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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CONAKRY 000236

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/24/17  
TAGS: [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AMER](#) [GV](#)  
SUBJECT: TFGV01: ENLISTING ECOWAS'S SUPPORT FOR A  
DIGNIFIED EXIT FOR PRESIDENT CONTE

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Classified by Ambassador Jackson McDonald. Reasons 1.4  
(b)(d)

11. (U) On February 24, the ECOWAS special envoy for Guinea, former Nigerian President Babingida, accompanied by ECOWAS Executive Secretary Chambas and other delegation members, received the U.S., French, German, and British ambassadors, the EC head of delegation, and the U.N. resident representative.

12. (U) Babingida and his delegation, who returned to Conakry on February 22, had already met with Prime Minister Eugene Camara, key ministers, political parties (both majority and opposition), labor unions, and civil society. They were scheduled to meet with Chief of Defense Staff General Kerfalla Camara and other members of the military command mid-day on February 24.

13. (C) The German ambassador, as current EU president, started off with general overview of the current crisis.

14. (C) Next, the U.S. Ambassador provided our analysis of the situation, using language similar to that in reftels. He then emphasized the need to address the leadership problem head on: President Conte is no longer up to the job; he will go one way or another; the U.S. wants a peaceful, civilian, constitutional transition.

16. (C) Based on the National Assembly's refusal the previous day to extend the state of siege, the Ambassador added to following: The Conte regime has been disavowed by the people, most notably during the mass demonstration on January 22. The Conte regime has now been disavowed by the National Assembly in which the people's representatives, including those from the majority party, voted unanimously against President Conte's request to extend the state of siege. This double disavowal highlights the Conte regime's incapacity to govern effectively; it calls into question the current regime's authority and legitimacy.

17. (C) The Ambassador said that President Conte and his civilian and military entourage should draw the obvious conclusion from this double disavowal -- Conte must go. The Ambassador recalled that the U.S. has requested the President of the National Assembly, the President of the Supreme Court, and the military command to effectuate a peaceful, dignified, constitutional exit for Conte, either by convincing him to resign or by invoking Article 34.

18. (C) The Ambassador urged Babingida and the ECOWAS delegation to endorse and facilitate Conte's smooth departure. If not, the crisis in Guinea will only deepen,

and it risks destabilizing the subregion.

¶9. (C) The French ambassador concurred, stressing the need to move urgently before Guinea succumbs to civil war, especially since various actors are starting to play the ethnic card -- a dangerous and irresponsible tactic.

¶10. (C) The U.S. Ambassador underscored the need for urgent action for two additional reasons. First, we are witnessing the last days of an authoritarian regime. History has shown that diehard members of such regimes often toughen their positions when their backs are against the wall. They can behave irrationally and lash out violently in last-ditch efforts to preserve their power. Second, the Guinean people continue to simmer; the street may boil over again in the days just ahead if the people do not see real change and some hope for the future.

¶11. (C) In a brief one-on-one exchange with Babingida, who was about to depart to meet with the military command, the Ambassador reiterated that we have asked General Kerfalla to facilitate a dignified way out for "his friend, his comrade-in-arms, his commander-in-chief, President Conte." The Ambassador asked Babingida to do likewise, based on his longtime acquaintance with Conte. (Conte came to power in 1984, Babingida in 1985; they worked together to create ECOMOG.) Babangida took note, saying he was stunned by Conte's bad condition -- "He can't even stand up."

¶12. Comment: Following their intensive consultations, Babingida and Chambas now have a good grasp of the nature and extent of the crisis. They see the problem clearly, including the leadership vacuum. It is uncertain, however, how forward-leaning their recommendations will be: A new prime minister? A new government of broad national

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consensus? Conte's departure?

McDONALD